



Miami Art Museum

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Shahzia Sikander

Nemesis

October 28, 2005 – January 15, 2006

New Work Gallery

Revitalizing, reinterpreting and reinventing the traditions of Indian art, Shahzia Sikander presents her distinctive insight into the dynamics of cultural dislocation at Miami Art Museum's *New Work* series beginning October 28. Sikander's creations occupy the space that divides sometimes antagonistic cultures, nations and religions through a kaleidoscopic range of media that have earned her international critical acclaim. The exhibition, curated by MAM Assistant Director for Special Projects / Curator Lorie Mertes, will be on view at MAM through January 15.

Sikander boldly reinvents the tradition of Indian miniature painting, which grew and flourished during the 16th and 17th centuries, in small-scale works on hand-prepared paper, murals, installations and animated films. Her creations reflect the shifting nature of boundaries — geographical, cultural and psychological — experienced by anyone who has left their country of origin to live in another country. The core of MAM's exhibition is a suite of graphite and ink works on paper, entitled *51 Ways of Looking* that incorporate Sikander's vocabulary of images and forms drawn from miniature painting traditions found in both Hindu and Muslim cultures. Whether in miniature or mural size, Sikander's multi-layered compositions renegotiate difference, making fluid the distinctions between past and present, Hindu and Islamic, and Eastern and Western, among many others,

"We're moving toward a visual culture of signs and symbols. How meaning is translated is often determined by where you are and where you are from," says Lorie Mertes. "In combining Hindu and Muslim imagery with Western influences and pop culture, Sikander reflects on how identity is fluid, sometimes rootless, and can exist on a superficial level."

51 Ways of Looking was developed from two basic structural forms, the circle and the rectangle. "I encourage the viewer to leave behind any cultural or personal assumptions, and in turn bring to these works as many ideas they can about the genesis of a circle and a rectangle," Sikander says. "This suite of drawings was created from humble beginnings with a heavy dose of imagination."

"My purpose in working with miniatures was to break with tradition, to experiment with it, to find new ways of making meaning. I needed to learn the language so I could talk back in it. I knew I had to master the craft in order to be creative," she added. "What interests me as an artist: how can you create work that somehow transcends place and time." Sikander's interest in time has taken on a new direction with her recent work in digital animation which extends Sikander's drawings in a time-based format. Her most recent animated video, made specifically for Miami Art Museum's exhibition, will receive its premiere at the MAM exhibition.

Shahzia Sikander is organized by Miami Art Museum and curated by Assistant Director for Special Projects / Curator Lorie Mertes as part of *New Work*, a series of projects by leading contemporary artists.

About the Artist

Born in the multicultural city of Lahore, Pakistan, Sikander grew up equally conversant with international pop culture and her country's heritage of miniature painting. Highly detailed and stylized, the art form originated as a courtly embellishment for royal manuscripts and reached its height during the Mughal empire (1526-1857), when Muslim rulers of Persia reigned over predominantly Hindu India. By Sikander's day, cliché miniature images were "abundant as gift items everywhere, saturating the tourist market," she recalls. "My initial feeling ... was that it was kitsch, but I saw the potential of subversion." After completing her studies at Study National College of Art in Lahore, she moved to the United States in 1993, where she where she received an M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1995. During her graduate and later post-graduate study at Houston's Glassell School of Art, Sikander discovered Southeast Asian painting styles that, given the highly charged political relationship between Pakistan and India, had previously been unavailable to her. Into her own Pakistani-based Mughal style, she began to incorporate the sensual designs and vibrant colors of the Indian Rajput school and the woman-centered format that first emerged in India's Kangra valley in the 18th century. Sikander's debut onto the New York art scene in 1997 quickly won attention and acclaim.

Since, she has been featured in solo shows at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut; the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art; ArtPace, San Antonio, Texas; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C; and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. She has been included in exhibitions such as "Drawing Now" at the Museum of Modern Art (2002); "Urgent Painting" at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2002), and the 1997 Whitney Biennial, as well as a part of international exhibitions including the Venice (2005) and Istanbul (2003) Biennials. Her work is included in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the San Diego Museum of Art. In 2005 Sikander was awarded the "tamgha-e-imtiaz," the National Medal of Honor bestowed by the Government of Pakistan on those who have attained academic distinction in the fields of science, art, and literature. Sikander lives in New York City.

About the Curator

Lorie Mertes assumed the position of Assistant Director for Special Projects/Curator at the Miami Art Museum, in 2004. She has been with MAM as a curator since 1994. Mertes has served as the curator of 15 exhibitions including *marking time: moving images*, and solo exhibitions by Russell Crotty, Jim Hodges, Liisa Roberts, and the first museum exhibition in the U.S. of collaborative work by Janine Antoni and Paul Ramírez Jonas. Mertes has served as MAM's curator-in-charge for more than 20 major traveling exhibitions at MAM including: *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972-85*; *Kerry James Marshall*, *Shirin Neshat*, *Let's Entertain*, *Roberto Matta*, and *About Face: Andy Warhol Portraits*. She currently serves as the editor of *Converge*, MAM's publication series documenting *New Work* exhibitions and has participated in the implementation of several education and audience development initiatives including Visitors Gallery, JAM at MAM and the museum's website. Mertes, a Florida native, graduated from the University of Florida with a bachelor's of fine arts degree in art history.

Related Publications and Programs

Gallery Notes

This illustrated, take-home brochure provides background information on Shahzia Sikander's work and an in-depth examination of the exhibition. Essay by guest writer Meg Linton, Curator of the Ben Maltz Gallery & Otis Public Programs at the Otis College of Art and Design. Available in the galleries. Free.

A new extensive catalogue of Sikander's work, published by the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College is available at the MAM store for \$19.95 and \$17.95 for MAM members.

Opening Reception

Thursday, October 27, 2005 6 - 8pm

DJ, hors d'oeuvres, donation bar

MAM Members free; Non-members \$5

RSVP via e-mail at MAMRSVP@miamidade.gov or call 305.375.1704

Sundays are Free at MAM

12 - 5pm

Guided tours of the exhibition every Sunday at 2 pm.

Sponsored by *The Miami Herald/El Nuevo Herald*.

Second Saturdays are Free for Families

Second Saturday of every month, 1 – 4pm

Drop in and enjoy fun, interactive programs. Families of all ages explore MAM together, find inspiration to create works of art, and participate in hands-on activities led by Gallery Teachers and student volunteers.

November 12

Tiny Treasures

Experience the art of Shahzia Sikander in the galleries, then join MAM's Gallery Teachers for the hands-on workshop. Create an exotic drawing – and do it with the detail that enlivens Sikander's drawings and animations!

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